

This Child's View Of Single-Motherhood

Posted By [Michael Brendan Dougherty](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 2:59 am In [Casual,Culture](#) | [101 Comments](#)

I remember quite clearly a scene from when I was 10 years old or so and anxious to see a new movie. My mother went out that night with an older cousin of mine, to have a drink, to talk to men, to share jokes. There were no cell phones then and she didn't call home. So I just kept walking by the window to see if the car had pulled up.

When she did come home I pummeled her with guilt. I didn't say anything explicitly. I simply pretended to be much sadder and more disappointed than I was or had a right to be. I did so out of selfishness, not out of some deep wound. Even my grandmother who watched me when my mother was away played the role I assigned her. My mother suffered from a deep concern over me and an acute awareness of what she, as a single-working mother, couldn't provide. I sensed all of this even then, and I used it against her. How dare my mother have a life apart from me, even for one evening.

This scene came back to me as I started reading a few things this morning. Over the weekend, the New York Times unveiled a [huge article](#) ^[1] examining how single motherhood entails tremendous financial struggle and diminished opportunities for children of fatherless homes. It causes and exacerbates America's growing inequality.

In response, Slate's Katie Roiphe, asks the Times to [stop, just stop](#) ^[2].

The [NYT] piece, in tender, gloomy detail, compares the slatternly home of the single mother, all struggle and chaos, to the orderly, promising, more affluent home of her boss, who is married. The moralizing portrait that emerges is not surprising: The single mother and her children have a terrible life, and the married mother and her children have a great one.

Roiphe is exaggerating. ("Slatternly?" Really?) Her response is harsh and nit-picky. It ignores the raft of social science data and indicts the Times for classism and moralism. She pretends that the Times is describing the single-mother as slutty. "The New York Times is recycling truly retrograde and ugly moral judgements," Roiphe writes. Roiphe asserts the dignity of these homes:

The anxious need to assert that the traditional two-parent family is better has outlived its usefulness. It's time to run a story about the resourcefulness, energy, and intensity of these homes, a fair, open-minded exploration of these new family structures and the independent, tough women who run them, not yet another unimaginative comparison with a family whose dad takes his son to Boy Scouts. ...

Jessica Schairer, the single mother at the center of all this outrageous moralism, put it nicely: "If you are an involved parent, whether there is one of you or two of you, your kids are going to feel like they can do whatever it is they want to do, whether they come from a family with money or a family with not much money."

I agree with Roiphe to a point, on the dignity of these homes. I also suspect, as she does, that the New York Times noticing this trend is a function of the fact that the social class to whom the Times pitches itself is becoming more self-consciously conservative in their social mores, at least when it comes to parenting. I don't find this development entirely unwelcome. But, pace Roiphe, the Times' piece really wrings its hands over "inequality", not the "slatternly" character of some women.

In any case, I don't think either the Times in its obsession with socio-economic status, or Roiphe in her rearguard defense of the sexual revolution grasp with the subject at hand. And I can't pretend to write the whole book on it here, but there are some things only a child of a single-mother could tell you about single motherhood.

I don't think my behavior that one night was the sole cause, but some time after that my mother really stopped having a life outside the home. She stayed in and conducted no romances of significance. Judging from her diaries and letters, the few men she engaged in even a passing interest were not all that good to her. As a single mother, helping to take care of her parents and her son, she wasn't in a position to make men be courtly with her. So she stopped trying. That was the sexual revolution for her. Men willing to sleep with her, but not willing to build a family.

By financial and emotional necessity, she became wrapped in a co-dependent relationship with her parents, who relied on her in their last years. And after they died and I became a teenager, our relationship in turn became more co-dependent as well. She tried being my friend as a teenager. But as I went on to college

and beyond I was her entire immediate family. And as I was trying to fly the nest, she needed my presence more than I could give it. I thought she might die when I told her I was moving to Washington D.C. and she would have to make do without me, at least during the work-week.

Obviously all the social science the Times presents in its article point to a basic truth: broken homes divide and scatter resources. My father, not a U.S. citizen, sent over some money when I was a child, but it didn't seem like much. They were never married and eventually he had his own household to look after, so there were no obligations to her specifically. He started sending money to me directly when I was a teenager.

Not having a father around meant I took on more student debt than I would have otherwise. It meant I would be recalled from college to do things around the house on the weekend, or I would come home just to make sure she was alright and make sure she spent time with someone. Instead of her helping me start life financially, I was helping her manage her mortgage payment, or paying for a new water-heater. I was happy to do so when I could. Though I often wondered where her actual disabilities were real, or when they were manufactured (even unconsciously) to bond me with her, even in hardships. In other single-mother households I knew, things functioned much less smoothly.

Helping her meant diminished resources for starting my own family when it came time. It also meant that there was no one else to manage things when she became sick and died last year.

My young childhood and adolescence (maybe my whole life) was wrapped up in searching for substitute father figures: uncles, neighbors, teachers, professors, priests, even God. I know I'm not alone in this. This state of life makes one especially vulnerable to peers and to predators. I survived just fine, others in similar situations don't.

Did my mother live a life of dignity? Yes, of course. She fought so much for what little she had, and cared for me almost recklessly. I do not blame her for her behavior. Although, I think even Roiphe would have wished for her to have more of a life apart from her child than she did. There was an emptiness in her life as I became more independent. Having lost the social role of mother, she had few other roles to play and took worse and worse care of herself. Discarded by men, unneeded by her son. In mysterious ways, she became more immature as she aged. I'd like to think more innocent too.

I remember telling myself little fantasies as a child and a young man, that my home, peaceful and harmonious if strapped, was probably better than the bickering and arguing and likely divorce that came with having two parents around. As if the only alternative to homes like mine are ones filled with resentment, yelling, and domestic abuse.

Writing checks, delivering take-out dinners, and trying to fit in 20 minutes of quality time with my empty-nester mom shook those fantasies out of me. We told ourselves all sorts of things while I was growing up, but my mother would have been happier, healthier, and more secure with a man to love, and with one who loved her. She would have had more of that if she had more children too.

So do I wish there were more social stigma, the "retrograde and ugly moral judgements" that surround decisions about sex and family? Absolutely. And yes, it would have cost her something if she indeed fell on the wrong side of those taboos. And it would cost me something to be a "bastard" if that word could still wound. People are nasty about social taboos, and I don't sanction that. But my mother faced plenty of indignities without those moral judgements. If we got do overs, I'd be willing to risk it.

From my perspective the sexual revolution liberated men to abandon the mothers of their children, defining fatherhood down to an alimony payment and maybe state-defined visitation. Women like my mother were expected to raise families entirely on their own emotional and financial resources, however meager. The answers given to the problems that this social revolution caused tend to be curt and unhelpful: contraceptive better. Or as my mother was ominously told by some upon my conception, "Just take care of it." Those seem like the "retrograde and ugly" moral sentiments to me.

Just because I turned out fine doesn't mean that everything is fine.

101 Comments To "This Child's View Of Single-Motherhood"

#1 Comment By [TomB](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 7:32 am

Boy this is a fine piece by Mr. Dougherty. And boy I can't help but feel nothing but contempt for Ms. Roiphe.

Does anyone believe that she would deny that each of two lesbians raising a child or a number of children are better off doing so together than they would be if they had to raise that child alone?

No. So, one can imagine, it's only for that little frisson of avant-garde ideological popularity she gets that leads Roiphe to cast a woman with a male husband or a committed male partner raising a child or children as being somehow *more* encumbered rather than less.

Or is it perhaps just a damning lack of imagination (damning for a so-called intellectual that is) that doesn't let her appreciate the absolutely unrelenting psychological burden carried by a single woman raising a child or children alone to successfully provide for and watch over those children? (Not to mention the physical, financial, emotional and social burdens of doing so as well.)

It's just disgusting how people like Roiphe just ... play with the lives of others in a way. Smug theorists, sitting back in their faculty lounges, deciding who today is living up to their self-exalted enthusiasms of the moment and who is not, without a care in the world for the real humans beings out there who live in the real world.

#2 Comment By [NGPM](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 8:31 am

I really think you nailed it, Michael, especially with that second-to-last paragraph. My parents did some crazy things – nothing like yours – and we got out okay, but they have always told us that they don't recommend in any way, shape or form that we follow that example.

Side question:

"the social class to whom the Times pitches itself is becoming more self-consciously conservative in their social mores, at least when it comes to parenting"

On what may we base this fascinating little tidbit? I've always seen the upper classes in America as relentlessly libertine.

#3 Comment By [JayDee](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 9:52 am

Wow, Tom, harsh. As is this article. This guy seems to be judging his mother for her love – for loving him above herself, for loving her parents. And he's asking us to feel sorry for himself because he had to help around the house more than the average self involved narcissistic American kid.

I raised 3 kids after my husband's death when they were 8, 11 and 14. They did grow up more responsible than most kids. They do still help me out – for instance this Mothers Day my two guys put in a new kitchen countertop as my requested gift. But I still pay their cell phone bills and their car insurance and the health insurance of my youngest.

If the day comes I need some financial help, they best not begrudge me that. And I'm not afraid they will. Because they are all kind and generous and strong and responsible and family oriented, good people. Did they miss having a dad? Yes. Did they miss having the kind of drunk, selfish, borderline abusive dad tht some of their friends did? No. Did they miss having a family where we are all for one and one for all? NO.

People need to take their judgments and stick them. Roiphe WAS speaking for the dignity of wonderful women who single parent. The last thing we needs is more condemnation from the likes of Tom or Michael Brendan Dougherty.

#4 Comment By [Michael Brendan Dougherty](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 10:06 am

JayDee,

I don't begrudge a thing I did to help out. And every day since she died I wish I could have been a better son, I wish that I gave more and could have given more. I'm not asking for anyone's pity.

I'm just illustrating the facts of it: single-motherhood means difficulties for mother and child alike. Roiphe and others make it out to be pioneering unconventional fun. But it means scattered resources, and not just financial ones.

#5 Comment By [David J. White](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 10:21 am

Jessica Schairer, the single mother at the center of all this outrageous moralism, put it nicely: "If you are an involved parent, whether there is one of you or two of you, your kids are going to feel like they can do

whatever it is they want to do, whether they come from a family with money or a family with not much money."

It would have been interesting to know how her kids actually feel, rather than letting her put her words in their mouths.

#6 Comment By [Sar](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 10:41 am

You say not having a father meant you took on more student debt. That is assuming that if you had a father around, he would contribute to your financial stability. That is just an assumption. If you had a dad like mine, drunk and not working for 25 years, it would not have resulted in less student debt.

#7 Comment By [JayDee](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 10:43 am

"I don't begrudge a thing I did to help out. "

Sure sounds like you did. Sure sounds like you blame her for the "guilt" you seem to feel about having to love her. You wish some other guy had taken over. I felt so bad for your mom reading this, knowing (as a mother) how this would break her heart.

I guess my kids were luckier in the sense that they had – and have – each other. We are a big family and no one has to handle anything alone. But family is about doing for one another – mother to son, son to mother, and all the rest of it. That your family was so small is just an idiosyncrasy.

When I read your story, what occurred to me is that your mom gave you life in a circumstance where many would not have. She could have had an abortion and had the easier life you claim to have wanted for her. One would think you'd feel more gratitude for the great gift of life she gave you. It's not as if you were raised in poverty and ignorance. She gave you a lot. No family has it all. No family is ideal or perfect. That was Roiphe's point, which you missed entirely.

#8 Comment By [JonM](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 10:50 am

Wow, JayDee, harsh. Mr. Dougherty isn't guilty of any the accusations you've made. The piece I read simply shared the side of single-motherhood that isn't glamorous. It is foolish to think that having less familial/financial support would be without negative impact. His remarks express that single mothers are indeed strong but that sacrifices and hardships come with the territory.

#9 Comment By [Michael Brendan Dougherty](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 10:54 am

JayDee,

You're reading something else into this piece that isn't there.

And if that was all Roiphe was arguing, obviously I wouldn't disagree.

Michael

#10 Comment By [JayDee](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 11:26 am

I guess I just get sick of men who argue that it is their presence – this almost sacred vision of the father who is a family's salvation – when the truth that Roiphe was trying to convey is that great families come in all configurations. And so do dysfunctional ones.

No family is perfect. No childhood is perfect. No parent is perfect. Plenty of kids grow up with dads that make their lives hell. Plenty grow up in the shadow of marriages that are misery.

This woman sounds like a hero to me. In fact, when I realized I was faced with raising 3 kids alone, the idea of becoming a hero is what got me through. I think Mr. Dougherty might want to talk to some kids who grew up with abusive, alcoholic parents or parents who went out and gratified themselves rather than devoted themselves to family the way his mom did.

Did I read too much into it? Maybe. But my heart broke for this lady, who sounds like a wonderful person. Hearing her relationship with her parents – who she HELPED, as so many kids do not – described as

"codependent" was probably the straw that broke the camel's back. Her son's presumption that only some male could have saved her (presumably from a life of loving and giving) was galling. Sorry.

#11 Comment By [Michael Brendan Dougherty](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 11:36 am

JayDee,

At this point you're determined to view me as an ungrateful git, fine.

I know plenty of kids who had terrible fathers. I just wanted her to have more than I could give her. I'm not talking about salvation, I'm talking about help.

#12 Comment By [Flavius](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 11:44 am

Good article. Very much worth saying, and well said. You can only put it out there. Anyone who wants to roll the dice on the "strong and independent woman" ethic, by all means, roll them. Some, alas, are without choice. But your word to the wise for the risk takers is worth heeding. The odds favor the house, and loneliness, wherever one finds it, is poverty.

#13 Comment By [TomG](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 12:02 pm

This is a beautiful but heart-rending piece, Mr.Dougherty. I hope it receives wide circulation.

#14 Comment By [JonM](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 12:08 pm

JayDee – you're way out of line, here. Mr. Dougherty never said his mother wasn't a hero. He never said his life was horrible or that others couldn't have had it worse. You are making many assumptions here. You don't know the details of his life.

You are turning his statements negative yourself. He is being honest about his experience. You couldn't possibly know his full story, from this post. And he isn't generalizing about every single-mother scenario, merely providing a glimpse into his own.

He never said that ONLY a father/male figure could have saved the situation. You are making these assumptions based on your own bias.

Give him the benefit of the doubt – or, maybe ask him to clarify and give more details where you have a concern. Your anger here is fabricated/misdirected.

#15 Comment By [VikingLS](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 12:18 pm

NGPM Statistically the upperclasses get married at a higher rate and are less likely to get divorced. They're also more likely in much of the country to attend church and be involved in the community. The upperclasses may talk libertine, but in practice they're pretty conservative.

#16 Comment By [TomB](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 1:08 pm

JayDee wrote:

"The last thing we needs is more condemnation from the likes of Tom"

Jay, methinks you just read too fast. Way too fast.

#17 Comment By [Felicia](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 1:22 pm

Michael– I love that your post addresses the issue from the POV of a child raised by a single mother. It gives your perspective and interesting voice, especially being from the male perspective. HuffPost Live is

conducting a live discussion in response to the article and we would love for your voice to be apart of the discussion. Please email me if interested. Thanks!

#18 Comment By [Brandee Strickland](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 2:10 pm

It's sad that your mother ended up so alone once you moved out into the adult world and that you felt personally responsible for her happiness. I was raised by a single mother; since I am a twin and also have a sister who is just a bit younger, my mother ended up with three girls under 3 when my Dad decided he wanted a divorce. I know that life was stressful for my Mom, but she did a great job raising us... I feel like I had a happy childhood (with some stressful and chaotic times, of course, but life is stressful). As an adult, I have fun with my mother and I don't feel like my sisters and I are her only company. She continues to welcome exchange students from around the world into her home (as she did when my sisters and I were in high school), and the exchange students always love her home and the accepting, welcoming atmosphere. Life isn't easy for anyone, and obviously the more responsible, loving people involved in the raising of children, the better. However, my experience as the child of a single mother was different from your own, so I thought I would share!

#19 Pingback By [Single Motherhood: A Child's First-person Account « The Family Forum](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 2:35 pm

[...] Read the whole thing here. [...]

#20 Comment By [Maisy](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 2:40 pm

As both the child of divorced parents and a divorced parent myself (I balk at the term "single mother" because both my dad and my kids' dad were/are a daily presence in their lives, doing all the usual "dad" things), I appreciate this honest perspective.

It strikes me, however, that an unhappily married woman in your mother's shoes — one who, for whatever reason, didn't cultivate much of a life outside of work and home, even after her child went off to college — would have most of the same problems. She would have turned to her parents and child for the emotional support her marriage lacked, and would have seemed lonely and lost as an older woman, while her husband — perhaps — drank beer in front of the TV, surfed the Internet, or generally ignored her when he wasn't being belittling or just a dreary, oppressive presence in her life.

I guess what I'm saying is that not having a husband, by itself, did not doom your mother to the life you describe. She could have had hobbies, friends, even — yes — a kind and decent boyfriend, despite the writer's petulant behavior that one night. A wise woman, married or not, learns to balance her own legitimate needs with the needs of her children and other family members. I'm sorry your mother wasn't quite able to do this (and she sounds like a lovely person who tended to put herself last), but while everyone could use a loving, considerate, handy, etc. husband, this often is simply not the case. Sometimes refusing to marry (or stay married to) a man who doesn't treat you very well, is the best thing you can do for yourself, and your kids.

Everything else is, as usual, what you make of it.

#21 Comment By [NGPM](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 2:52 pm

May I humbly submit that JayDee, at the very least, has entirely and utterly MISSED THE POINT of this whole ordeal? And that her assertion of some sort of "presumption that only some male could have saved her (presumably from a life of loving and giving)" on the part of Michael is highly loaded?

Getting back to the original argument, laws governing legitimacy existed for a number of reasons. An obvious one was to protect legitimate children against claims by illegitimate children on their fathers' estate. It is one simple and fairly unobtrusive way of protecting children from their parents' misbehavior.

The reduced legal status that came with illegitimacy led to a kind of social stigma; together, these provided a powerful *prima facie* disincentive — at least for the female — to engage in behavior — or, for the parents, to permit such behavior — that would produce illegitimate offspring and make for a life of hardship.

Once the illegitimate child has come into the world, there is no question that it is in itself a blessing, though the responsibility becomes all the heavier and more burdensome. Michael's anecdote is a powerful

testimony to the degree to which this still holds true today, even though the legal and reputational hardships associated with out-of-wedlock birth have been greatly reduced.

"great families come in all configurations"

Highly untrue. For one thing, while you may be justly proud of having raised your three children on your own, you admit yourself that your children missed having a dad, and doubtless life would have been easier had their father remained alive.

More to the point, however, I am going to go out on a limb and guess that your children did not begin using the matronymic as a surname upon your husband's death. The family structure remains patriarchal and defined around this unit of a marriage between a man and a woman. This is true of ALL civilized societies, and it is a prerequisite for rising above the caveman level. (Yes, I realize there are polygynous civilizations, but each marriage is between one man and one woman, i.e., a man's multiple wives are not married to each other.)

Generation after generation, families will by necessity revert to this patriarchal configuration, even if there are occasional deviations. The hardships imposed by such deviations ensure this: either the lesson will be learned and the family structure reintegrated, or the bloodline will die out.

Of course, in the preceding paragraphs, I am working on the assumption that we are on the same page so far as morals and society are concerned. I don't know what JayDee's beliefs are. If she wants to make some sort of feminist or gay rights argument AGAINST the patriarchal family as a prerequisite for civilized society, that is a different matter entirely. As a working pro I do not personally feel up to that sort of argument in terms of time and energy. Nevertheless, Katie Roiphe's piece is both shrill and terribly written, not a good case "for" or "against" anything.

Statistically the upperclasses get married at a higher rate and are less likely to get divorced. They're also more likely in much of the country to attend church and be involved in the community. The upperclasses may talk libertine, but in practice they're pretty conservative.

I was aware of all that, but hasn't it always been the case? I was curious as to the assertion that they were becoming "more" conservative.

#22 Comment By [Gair De](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 3:28 pm

As a woman who raised her son on her own, I really appreciate your honesty. I am going to share this article with him and hope it will open the door to our own honest conversation about what it was like for him in a single parent home.

#23 Comment By [cka2nd](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 3:57 pm

Damn me for a statist, but can anyone speak to the social policies in place in some (many?) Western European countries to support single parents?

#24 Comment By [DeeAnn](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 4:12 pm

Thanks for sharing this. I don't think anyone would argue that being a single mom/dad is much harder than having 2 committed parents in the home. Kudos to the women and men who do such a great job in a tough situation! I do think as a society we shouldn't be afraid to warn kids/teenagers/adults that it is MUCH harder to do this on their own than if they would wait, find a good mate and THEN have kids. It would benefit everyone. I don't know why we are so afraid of an "ideal" as if that makes everyone who doesn't reach the "ideal" a loser. (hint: it doesn't, just means it's a harder road in most cases).

#25 Comment By [Mercer](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 4:19 pm

"From my perspective the sexual revolution liberated men to abandon the mothers of their children"

That may be true in your case. It is not the only perspective. Many women are like Bristol Palin and don't want to marry a man with limited prospects even if it means being a single mother. Many mothers choose to divorce the fathers of their children against their husbands wishes.

I don't agree with the line I excerpted but thought the post was a well written piece.

#26 Comment By [mommylinda](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 4:37 pm

Any social worker will tell you that the best way to avoid crushing poverty is to graduate high school, get full time employment, and marry before having children. It is not that difficult, but it is politically incorrect. I am so glad that the author prevailed. I have known other children who have done so, and some who have not.

I like Charles Murray's comment that the upper 20% needs to preach what they practice.

#27 Comment By [Alejo](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 4:51 pm

Very good piece Mr. Dougherty! My parents divorced when I was 12 and even though we were financially comfortable, my father is a small business owner and always helped my mother, a single parent home is just not the same. I don't understand why so many people have this need to justify and glorify single parenthood. If it happens, oh well, do the best you can, but don't glorify it or pretend that it is a great thing.

It takes a man and a woman to "make" a child, why is it so difficult to understand that having those same people around is most usually the best way to raise that child? I recently learned that my father pressured my mom to have an abortion early in their relationship. He did not force her to but he wanted to get rid of the "problem". This really pains me. The sexual revolution has benefited men a lot more than women. Using women is so much easier nowadays, and let's be honest it is much easier for women to use men as well.

I am 25 but I sometimes daydream about how it would have been having my parents together and three instead of just two siblings. I always wanted an older brother.

#28 Comment By [Bubba](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 5:26 pm

I can't help but note that the author chose to wait until after his mother's death to let the world know she should have made better choices.

I wish people wouldn't project so much. My family remained intact through the "sexual revolution". My mother, a woman who could have had a full and fulfilling life as a single mother, chose to heed the old rules and remained married to a man who also could have had a full and fulfilling life with another woman. Instead, my mother died, mentally and physically shattered far too early, and my father went on to live another happy three decades with nary a word between us.

The author here just thinks he wants what he didn't have. He has no idea what might have been. Nor do I, of course, but I don't make the mistake of suggesting that more stigma is the solution.

#29 Comment By [cka2nd](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 5:36 pm

mommylinda says: "I like [sic] Charles Murray's comment that the upper 20% needs to preach what they practice."

Except that Mr. Murray is awfully picky about what he thinks the "upper 20%" should preach about. Marriage yes, environmentalism no. David Frum catalogued Murray's screeds against certain types of upper class preachiness.

#30 Comment By [Sue](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 6:21 pm

Thank you for this.

I've been told breast-feeding education has been more successful since they started including info on the benefits to the mom, maybe the same could be said about single motherhood—if we start being honest about how it hurts women, not just kids, that would be a step in the right direction.

"That was the sexual revolution for her. Men willing to sleep with her, but not willing to build a family."

Not just her. When I was a professor I saw so many young women struggling to figure out why the men (boys) they were sleeping with didn't want the things they wanted.

#31 Pingback By [Michael Brendan Dougherty Returns to TAC | The American Conservative](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 6:25 pm

[...] web readers have already seen, Michael Brendan Dougherty has returned to The American Conservative as our national correspondent [...]

#32 Comment By [Nick](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 9:12 pm

I was not technically raised in a single-parent household, but close enough. Actually, given my parents, I was raised in a no-parent, or certainly no adult household. My parents were on-again, off-again for most of their fitful 17 year relationship and when they were off, we lived in whatever dump my mother could deceive somebody into renting us or with her parents. The only good part about this was getting to spend time with my grandparents. And even when they were "on," my dad was a long-haul truck driver who has spent the last 20 years clinically depressed (but undiagnosed), so it was basically a single parent household.

And you know what? I WOULD trade that experience for ANYTHING.

What I find striking about women like Roiphe and the reset of her ilk, still pathetically clinging to the feminist ideal of the single woman with children as accessories, is that they truly do not give a damn about the children. Children are just collateral damage from the sexual revolution, which is why contraception and abortion are more sacred to the feminist lot than the product when neither are used .

I'm not going to beat around the bush, I wholeheartedly reject the premise that, in the absence of abuse or severe family discord, a single-parent household is equivalent to a two-parent household. When we finally stop telling ourselves this lie so the faculty at Wellesley and Barnard have something to write dissertations on, the working class in this country will be much better off. Being dependent on two incomes may be a trap, but being dependent on only one is a financial death sentence for all but the privileged women who believe they can have it all (so why can't everybody else just be more like them). Children need the balance of two personalities, and the parents need the balance of having somebody else to depend on to help raise the children.

Note that I am NOT arguing that children need a traditional family. I have no reason to believe that to be true. But having experienced what essentially amounted to the absence of a parent for most of my childhood (and all of my adolescence), I am here to tell you that the feminists are on the wrong side of both history and reality.

#33 Comment By [jamado](#) On July 17, 2012 @ 10:59 pm

Mr.Dougherty is to be praised for this insightful and accurate article. Even though my oldest son remarked to me when he, a Phi Beta Kappa, received his PH D from an Ivy in an intellectually challenging field; *This is what comes from a broken home* and even though I saw to it that all my children had educations and meaningful degrees and even though each one is kind, honest and productive; the truth is that it was hell and the cost is enormous to each of us. The scars are deep and the resentments eternal. More serious, a child of a single parent household has no idea what a good marriage is and so has no guide for his/her own. Two parent homes of mature, financially productive and morally straight adults is better than being raised in a home of a single mother or single father, no matter how dedicated, self sacrificing, hard working and independent she or she is.

#34 Pingback By [Michael Brendan Dougherty on Bastardy | FavStocks](#) On July 18, 2012 @ 3:12 am

[...] Michael Brendan Dougherty: This Child's View Of Single-Motherhood: [...]

#35 Comment By [Ryan](#) On July 18, 2012 @ 4:37 am

As the product of a divorced mother, which is different than a single mother, I relate so much to the experiences shared by the author. Though my case was slightly different, as all are, I find that the sexual revolution is based upon the philosophy of what's good for the geese is good for the gander. Namely, child bearing has become a state of a personal journey for fulfillment in the life of the parent rather than the

product of a loving relationship by two parents. The effect could provide the emotional fulfillment that certain unmarried women who find themselves husbandless in the their late 30's and early 40's are looking for but it leaves a generation of children (especially my generation) trying to pick up the pieces and understand what fathers and a family is and could be.

#36 Comment By [TomB](#) On July 18, 2012 @ 5:26 am

One aspect that strikes me as incredibly important in this whole issue and that as yet has gone totally unmentioned here is what I think is the undeniable sexism—or something-ism—that exists and afflicts single mothers.

We see a young child going to school looking unkempt, unwashed, arriving without breakfast or totally unprepared or etc., and we tend immediately to wonder about the mother first, and then only secondarily about the father, if at all.

I don't know if this is classic sexism—in a big way, after all, might be said to regard men as less able to take care of children than women—but who care's what ism it is if it's wrong, and it is.

So what a psychological burden on the responsible single mother: Feeling that if her kid isn't showing up just as washed and outfitted and etc. as all the other kids nobody's going to first start thinking askance about the father. Indeed they may not even pause to that the child came from a broken home and so just assume Dad is intimately in the picture. Instead, responsible Mother feels, with much unfortunate validity, "they are all going to be looking primarily at *me.*"

It's grossly unfair, and probably the kind of thing that kept Dougherty's mother from dating. (Whereas I tend to doubt his father so constricted himself.)

Then again it has always amused me that in the traditional view of an old-time traditional married couple (husband working, wife raising kids), our unconscious, gestalt-derived view of them tends to focus on the perceived status and thus difficulty of the husband's job. ("Oh the Jones', sure we know them, he's a banker....")

And yet the difficulties in managing the successful raising of children just seems to me to be incredibly hard given all the potential problems and pitfalls to be encountered. In many many ways putting the problems of banking to utter shame.

Cuts all kinds of ways I know: Slams our devaluation of mothers and motherhood, slams feminism not recognizing that, and etc., etc. But nevertheless still seems to me to be the case out there.

#37 Comment By [NGPM](#) On July 18, 2012 @ 9:40 am

"It's grossly unfair, and probably the kind of thing that kept Dougherty's mother from dating. (Whereas I tend to doubt his father so constricted himself.)"

Life in general is not fair, but there is a terser reason why women with illegitimate children find it difficult to date: men often do not want to deal with other men's children. I know I do not. I would have a very difficult time trying to integrate a child that was not my own, and many other men feel the same way.

#38 Comment By [Jeannie](#) On July 18, 2012 @ 10:36 am

I don't even know what the point of this article was? That Dougherty would have been better off if his mother hadn't sacrificed her life to have him and give him all she could? That she should have had an abortion?

Comments like this: "still pathetically clinging to the feminist ideal of the single woman with children as accessories, is that they truly do not give a damn about the children." ... are quite amazing.

Note which parent in Dougherty's story ABANDONED him – the dear old dad, who takes NONE of the blame from either Dougherty or the anti-feminist ranters. Note which parent behaved like a saint, to both this son and her parents – the one being disparaged as needy, passive aggressive and codependent.

I'm amazed people are praising this author. I'm sure his mother would not. Poor woman.

#39 Pingback By ['This Child's View of Single Motherhood' « Family Scholars](#) On July 18, 2012 @ 11:52 am

[...] NYT piece on Sunday. Michael Brenden Dougherty has an excellent response to Roiphe, titled "This Child's View of Single Motherhood": Over the weekend, the New York Times unveiled a huge article examining how single [...]

#40 Comment By [awb](#) On July 18, 2012 @ 1:34 pm

A courageous and poignant piece.
Thank you.

#41 Comment By [Tom](#) On July 18, 2012 @ 2:12 pm

Since the children of the two women in the story are still young we don't know how they will turn out. What we DO know is their chances are better if the parents are married and what we SHOULD know is intelligent people put the odds on their side. And what we SHOULD know in situations like this (raising children) is CONSIDERATE people would want to do everything to put the odds on their children's side. Quit whining about the author of this article and the Times story and start thinking about the children.

#42 Comment By [J Ireland](#) On July 18, 2012 @ 2:37 pm

Absolutely the best, most compassionate, decent, and sensible piece on this topic I have ever read. I find myself in the same situation as the author's mother. I left an abusive marriage that would have ruined me (and my children) financially – in order that I could be happier, rather than passively suicidal-ish, and thereby model "how to be happy" for my children. Their other parent does not provide such a model, so I believed I had to gamble on the possibility. I know there is an alternative other than "resentment, yelling, and domestic abuse" or single parenthood: my own parents are happily approaching 50 years of marriage. I did not find what they have and could not pretend I had.

I now find I am living the constrained, narrowed life of Dougherty's mother in order to give my children even 40% of what my parents gave to me. I choose this, because not choosing seems impossible. I hope I shall retain the desire for an expanded life and pursue it once the children need me less. After all, their childhood *does* "go by so fast" just as my elders said.

As for Roiphe, she seems to have been responding not to the NYT article, but to the obsessed magical thinkers (and they are legion) who think that the right legal measures, e.g. eliminating "no-fault" divorce, can eliminate single parenthood. This is as realistic as believing making contraception unavailable will stop people from having sex, and it is maddening...mainly because it keeps us from thinking about how our laws, our workplaces, etc. could alleviate *some* of the difficulties of the single working parent and his or her children, to the benefit of us all.

Thanks again, Mr. Dougherty. This is a keeper.

#43 Pingback By [Resilience and Sensitivity | The American Conservative](#) On July 18, 2012 @ 2:56 pm

[...] When adult children do get a chance to reflect on and interpret their family circumstances, as in Michael Brendan Dougherty's and Noah Millman's pieces here, there's a difficult balance to strike. There are at [...]

#44 Comment By [J Ireland](#) On July 18, 2012 @ 2:57 pm

Thanks also to TomB (this publication is such an oasis of intelligent, gracious – and empathetic! – comments). One thing I would add to your well-phrased reflections: you correctly refer to "our unconscious, gestalt-derived view of [fathers] tends to focus on the perceived status and thus difficulty of the husband's job."

Like Father Knowing Best, I also work in a job I fancy is rather high-status and difficult. The children's father believes I am thus "rich" in comparison to him. To be fair, this is true. And he does contribute in a few other ways, but I note that he perceives mainly the "status" and money associated with my employment, not the "difficult" bit. In other words, I am most of the old-time married *couple* in *one* weary carcass.

I chose this, it is not unexpected. What I do tire of is the larger society's unwillingness to acknowledge that my choice is no longer "deviant," and will never again be so, no matter how much they may wish it.

#45 Pingback By ["Resilience and Sensitivity"](#) On July 18, 2012 @ 3:19 pm

[...] which those who can't do teach, at AmCon! (And btw you really, really should read this piece by Michael Brendan Dougherty on growing up with a single mother.)Filed Under: Uncategorized Tagged With: children will listen, I am the least resilient person I [...]

#46 Comment By [NGPM](#) On July 18, 2012 @ 4:10 pm

To Jeannie: there are few things funnier than watching feminists come unglued at what has not been said. In the same vein, there are few things more satisfying than watching feminists who profess to hate men run after us. And there are few things sadder than watching fellow men fall for them in return...

#47 Comment By [NGPM](#) On July 18, 2012 @ 4:23 pm

"As for Roiphe, she seems to have been responding not to the NYT article, but to the obsessed magical thinkers (and they are legion) who think that the right legal measures, e.g. eliminating "no-fault" divorce, can eliminate single parenthood. This is as realistic as believing making contraception unavailable will stop people from having sex, and it is maddening...mainly because it keeps us from thinking about how our laws, our workplaces, etc. could alleviate *some* of the difficulties of the single working parent and his or her children, to the benefit of us all."

Then Roiphe is combating a straw-man. No one here has even mentioned no-fault divorce or contraception legislation, let alone claimed that no-fault divorce will eliminate single parenthood or that banning contraception will eliminate out-of-wedlock pregnancy.

But since you bring it up, let us remember that the law is an important teacher. If laws and workplaces attempt to alleviate ""*some* of the difficulties of the single working parent and his or her children" in a systematic fashion, this amounts to subsidizing single-parent families. If they attempt to set criteria for subsidizing only "worthy" cases (as undoubtedly there are), they will be setting up a bureaucratic, invasive, bloated and moralizing nanny state (unless the workplaces in question are small family-run businesses).

The simple fact is that the traditional family structure is in the long run the most efficient and durable way to pre-empt as much of this sort of bad as possible. In the past, the difficulty of separation was incentive enough to be careful (and for the respective families to pay attention) when choosing a spouse, and the difficulty of procuring contraception and abortion was incentive enough for elders to keep the sexes segregated until adulthood and to get their kids mature quickly enough to marry them off young.

Obviously, with the immediate physical consequences gone, we have largely lost the habit of using good sense, and re-establishing traditional rules to encourage good sense might mean a generation or two of widespread irreversible mistakes and painful lessons as the collective social mentality adjusts to its older forms. But how is that different from what the last two generations have been reared on?

#48 Comment By [Jason Jehosephat](#) On July 18, 2012 @ 4:51 pm

" there are some things only a child of a single-mother could tell you about single motherhood." If that child can tell us, then that child can also tell a person who's writing a larger piece on the subject, who can then combine it with the stories from other such children of single mothers, examine the common traits and tendencies of these scenarios, and present them to us as a bigger-picture view. Whereas that one child can tell us *only* about *that one child's* experience with a single mother, based on which he *cannot* give us any kind of bigger picture--and, in fact he could be an outlier. So, please, let's not buy into this sort of protest, which in its more general form says that we can't trust researchers, we can trust only individuals with their personal anecdotes.

Now, as to the question of whether kids are better off in homes with two married parents: can we please *not* ask that irrelevant question. Instead, please ask the question as to whether kids are better off in single-mother homes versus in a home with two married parents *whose marriage is a shambles* and who stay together only because their own principles or beliefs or those imposed on them by their families or communities discourage divorce. Let's consider whether kids are better off in homes where their parents scream at each other several times a day and, sometimes, even carry that screaming over to the kids,

compared to homes where the mother might be beleaguered or unfulfilled, but isn't filling her kids' lives with constant stress.

#49 Pingback By [Two Ways of Looking At a Revolution – NYTimes.com](#) On July 18, 2012 @ 5:25 pm

[...] of anti-gay bigotry, etc.) and some as givens, while also recognizing the crying need to address the revolution's excesses, disappointments and nasty side effects. This stance would be neither the "containment" nor the "rollback" posture [...]

#50 Comment By [NGPM](#) On July 18, 2012 @ 5:35 pm

"Now, as to the question of whether kids are better off in homes with two married parents: can we please not ask that irrelevant question. Instead, please ask the question as to whether kids are better off in single-mother homes versus in a home with two married parents whose marriage is a shambles and who stay together only because their own principles or beliefs or those imposed on them by their families or communities discourage divorce."

You who so cherish the "big picture," pray tell: why then is the first, more general question you cite irrelevant, and the second, more loaded and more anecdotal, question more salient?

#51 Comment By [TomB](#) On July 18, 2012 @ 6:32 pm

You know, stepping back a bit from the intricacies of all this there's just a sort of acceptance (or at least unremarked upon recognition) of what can only be described as the massive guilt of lots of the men involved in these things.

Perhaps in the most minor respect, that is, one can still perceive a sort of disparity whenever hears just of a divorce. The disparity, of course, being in the first thought I think lots of us still have wondering "gee, I wonder what *she* was like to have resulted in this." At the very least even if not that strong, there's still a bit of the feeling that really, men are so laid back that so long as the wifey was even reasonably sane or etc. there would be no divorce.

And that's at the minimal level of disparity. How come, when we assess the child of a divorce, there's nowhere *near* the kind of unspoken expectation and pressure on the divorced dads to be involved with their kids that this is on their mothers not just to *be* there, but to be doing a great job at it in addition?

For instance, and I'll admit this might be extreme: How come there's no at least dubious blinking at the idea of a divorced man with a child or children getting remarried to a woman who also has children that he will be living with?

After all, if the divorced wife *doesn't* get remarried she's carrying the vast bulk of the duty on—as JIII I put it—their sole "weary carcass." (Not to mention voluntarily denying herself the comfort of a companion because one has not appeared who would be good enough for her kids.)

And if the divorced mother *does* get remarried or etc., I think the presumption is that she *has* found someone who would be good for her kids, and that should make us all happy.

But what about the divorced *father* who remarries a woman with her own kids? Or just is out co-habiting or spending lots of time with a woman with her own kids? He's got time for someone else's kids but not his own?

Of course the iron law is that any specific situation can defy the generalization. But in my experience it's not at all an invalid generalization to say that gee, men sure get off easy in this.

And what the hell does this say about *their* fathers? Fathers who don't raise their sons with the idea that ... "you have a child and you've made the most profound decision you could possibly make and to *be* a man you damn well better live up to it"?

Indeed, may be the big problem faced by single mothers: How to instill men's values into their boys without a man around to teach them, hopefully mostly by example? Damn tough.

It's just grossly unfair when you think about it, and pretty damning of men. But so fucking be it. And if you doubt it, think of seeing a divorced woman with custody of a kid or two out three times at night in one week, and tell me you don't wonder a bit.

And then consider seeing the father of those same kids out three times a week at the bar or a nightclub or on dates, and how many of us think "how come he isn't at the very least sitting in front of his kids keeping them company, much less helping with their homework?" (Indeed, lots of the sentiment would admirably be "that old dog....")

For my money then it's *men* and *manhood* that ought to be the focus of the conversation here, and in the public sphere. Because just by talking about the women aspect tends to imply that that's where the bulk of at least some problem lies, and in general but in light of the general reality that's just grotesque.

#52 Comment By [NGPM](#) On July 18, 2012 @ 6:48 pm

"Of course the iron law is that any specific situation can defy the generalization. But in my experience it's not at all an invalid generalization to say that gee, men sure get off easy in this."

Of course they do. That is why women have the greater burden and incentive to guard their chastity: they have more to lose, physically and by extension socially. With regards to the men, honor and its later extension chivalry demand that men of the community, such as fathers, brothers and priests, look out for the females in their care.

"For my money then it's *men* and *manhood* that ought to be the focus of the conversation here, and in the public sphere."

Indeed, and as has been said elsewhere, it was men (such as Sade, Laclos and Heffner) who invented feminism for the purposes of emancipating women from their families so they would be more willing to sleep with/vulnerable to exploitation by their libertine exploiters. Men need to act like men and take responsibility. Until they do, more women, children and even men will suffer.

But the original post was not about men, or about women. It was about the inevitable hardship of single parenthood, and the virtue of the social stigma attached to out-of-wedlock pregnancy in helping to prevent such difficult situations from arising in the first place. It was the shrill feminists who turned the subject in the direction of "women," and Michael's supposed "undervaluing" of his mother.

#53 Pingback By [Fixing single motherhood | CatholicVote.org](#) On July 18, 2012 @ 10:56 pm

[...] Brendan Dougherty writes about his experience growing up as the child of a single mother. His story highlights the [...]

#54 Comment By [Maggie Gallagher](#) On July 18, 2012 @ 11:56 pm

Thank-you for this tribute to your mother. That you were her whole life posed a burden for you-unfairly-but you were able to bear it because you had a mother who sacrificed the rest of her life to be a mother for you.

Thank-you for growing to be a man who will not impose the same burdens on his children but will instead bear burdens for them. This is a tribute to your mother too.

I was first an unwed mother and then a married mother.

Trying not to be a burden to the son who leaves you is the hardest part.

#55 Pingback By [The Out-Of-Wedlock Stigma | The Penn Ave Post](#) On July 19, 2012 @ 8:24 am

[...] on July 19, 2012 by Andrew Sullivan Michael Brendan Dougherty, who was raised by a single mother, wants more social pressure against having illegitimate children. Noah Millman counters: [T]here [...]

#56 Comment By [B-Rob](#) On July 19, 2012 @ 9:42 am

I used to feel this way about single mothers; I do not any more because I consider the alternative. To start with, more stigma towards single mothers would create more disincentives to having a child out of wedlock. If you are pro-life, are greater disincentives to having a child a GOOD thing? It only makes abortion seem like more of an "answer" to the problem if you are pregnant out of wedlock. Indeed, I wonder whether one of the reasons abortion rates are decreasing is due to less stigma aimed at women who have babies out of

wedlock; if single parenthood seems more "doable," maybe the decision to abort becomes harder. (As a moderate, I would note that an expansion of social welfare supports would also do the same thing, but that is probably a bridge too far for the conservative mind.)

I would also note the demographic effects single parenthood has on the populace. Right now, about one third of all White children are born out of wedlock. Even with that, the White female birth rate is plunging. The out of wedlock birth rates for Black women are about 70%, but the overall Black female birthrate is plunging faster than for White females. If you were to "delete" all those out of wedlock births, both White and Black females would be well below replacement rate, and the overall birthrate would drop by something approaching 50%. (And, no, Latinas do not make up the slack, since their out of wedlock birth rates are significant, and their overall birth rates are dropping too, though not as fast as Black and White females.) Meaning, if not for out of wedlock births . . . if those children were aborted, or never conceived in the first place, the US would be facing the kind of demographic problems that Italy and China and Russia are facing now — aging populations with no children replacing the codgers who pass on.

Finally, if you are against single parenthood, you need to be boosting the use of contraceptives. I do not understand why conservatives orient their policy positions on the non-sensical notion that 16 to 25 year old healthy males and females will not have sex with one another simply because they are not married. I am willing to bet that NO ONE commenting here was a virgin when they got married for the first time. So why they expect others to do what they did not do is beyond me . . .

#57 Comment By [sami](#) On July 19, 2012 @ 9:54 am

"She fought so much for what little she had, and cared for me almost recklessly." And it is no wonder, when you behaved so poorly when she tried to have a life. Nothing like ramming a guilt trip on her.

#58 Comment By [NGPM](#) On July 19, 2012 @ 11:11 am

"If you are pro-life, are greater disincentives to having a child a GOOD thing? more stigma towards single mothers would create more disincentives to having a child out of wedlock. If you are pro-life, are greater disincentives to having a child a GOOD thing? It only makes abortion seem like more of an "answer" to the problem if you are pregnant out of wedlock."

First of all, most people who are "pro-life" would agree with you. As one who opposes abortion both as a moral choice and a legal option and who believes that life begins at conception, I strongly dislike the term "pro-life." Who is NOT, after all, "pro-life"? Organisms live and die all the time. Are "right-to-life"ers against nature?

Regarding fecundity, let us not forget that China, for one, ENGINEERED its present "demographic problems" and chooses to continue the same policies that led to these. Tant pis.

Regarding contraceptives, and the incentives to have abortion via stigmatization of out-of-wedlock pregnancy, I can only say that 1) fathers keeping an eye on their daughters can accomplish the same thing, and probably more effectively, and even more so if we stopped overeducating our children and expected them to grow up enough to marry by age 20, and 2) I wish "right-to-life"-ers would stop behaving as though life began at conception but ended at birth.

In any case, realistic estimates (which are admittedly hard to make) suggest that the abortion rate was far, far lower before abortion was legal, even though out-of-wedlock pregnancy was lower (again, statistics are likely underreported, but it is pretty well undeniable that it was less common), fertility rates higher and contraceptives more difficult to procure.

Not much of a case for further loosening of standards of acceptability, but some people just thrive on moral panic:

STOP the ABORRRRRRTIONNNNS at all costs! Save the BAAAABIIIIIEES!

That's a caricature, I know, but it's not far off from the mindset of most militant right-to-lifers. I know one guy who, though very philosophical and traditionalist on Catholicism and politics, got all beady-eyed when Santorum came up: « Il est BIEN, Santorum ! » and that, even after I explained to him patiently why Santorum was NOT « bien ».

#59 Comment By [billhawk](#) On July 19, 2012 @ 11:14 am

@ B-Rob: I am one of those that you bet wouldn't respond. I was a virgin up to my wedding night (at age 27) as was my wife. In fact the majority of my admittedly conservative friends fall into this category. Until relatively recently this was expected of each person. Although I accept that this is an increasingly rarer trend, it is far from unlikely, IF it is expected of us. Throughout my childhood sexual responsibility was reinforced in me, as it was in most of my friends. I was capable of it, as we all are, and I was told so. When we provide contraception to our children, or at least teach that it is a handy tool, what chance do our children have? If we say "it is best to save the gift of your sexuality until marriage...but if you can't, then use this" what child will take option A? Contraceptives will always degrade women, as the author here pointed out. Read Mahatma Ghandi on the subject. All of us to a one should be capable of being in command of our sexuality, and maintaining responsibility for our actions even when we fail. If we can't expect this of ourselves and our children, then what right do we have to criticize anyone who misuses his / her sexuality? Can we expect Jerry Sandusky for instance to be responsible with his urges when this is beyond grasp of than the 16-25 year olds you mentioned? Raise the bar, you might be surprised who can still get over it.

#60 Comment By [NGPM](#) On July 19, 2012 @ 12:40 pm

At the turn of the twentieth century, progressives derided moralists who argued that contraceptives would logically lead to promiscuity. When promiscuity became rampant, they insisted more readily available contraceptives were necessary to prevent out-of-wedlock pregnancy.

When abortion was illegal, liberals and the left insisted that regulating abortion would at least result in lower maternal deaths. When abortion rates spiked, they insisted abortion just wasn't a bad thing after all. When abortion became so rampant as to outweigh these gains, they insisted more contraception would lead to lower abortion rates.

And now that abortion, contraception and out-of-wedlock birth are at catastrophically high rates, we are supposed to believe that more contraceptives and further subsidies and less stigmatization of out/of-wedlock birth will save children from abortion, and that single-parent homes are an institutionally great thing, after all.

Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice...

#61 Comment By [Cadeau Albert](#) On July 19, 2012 @ 1:32 pm

The sexual revolution wasn't about women spreading their legs irresponsibly. Contraception was widely available; USE IT!

#62 Comment By [Grace](#) On July 19, 2012 @ 1:37 pm

"Having lost the social role of mother, she had few other roles to play and took worse and worse care of herself. Discarded by men, unneeded by her son."

This is such a strange way to present the mother in this history. But even if the mother herself viewed her value only through the lens of the people around her, it's important to note that this is not a single-mother phenomenon. I know of plenty of empty-nester mothers who demand their kids come home for dinner once a week, or who call incessantly, or who fall into depression. They live in nice homes with attentive husbands, but for some reason, they're the type of woman who reacts to children growing up in a particular way. As I read I thought less that MBD's childhood was the result of single parenthood and more that the adult figure was somehow pliant or weak in his eyes. It sounds like he was missing backbone and structure in his life and has labeled that empty space "father", without taking into consideration that not all men fit the bill.

There's a lot in this story that seems to be specific to MBD's mother, rather than single mothers in general. If a man doesn't treat a woman well, there is no reason to tolerate him – that is not a specific standard for a single mom, that is a standard for women in general. "As a single mother, helping to take care of her parents and her son, she wasn't in a position to make men be courtly with her." A woman's responsibilities has no bearing on how a man treats her. If a man doesn't like that she's got a son and reliant parents, then he can stop dating her. And she can stop dating him.

"We told ourselves all sorts of things while I was growing up, but my mother would have been happier, healthier, and more secure with a man to love, and with one who loved her. She would have had more of that if she had more children too." The first part is bizarre, as ANYONE is happier, healthier and more secure with an adult partner who loves them. That is because that person can shoulder some of your burdens and protect you when you're vulnerable, and you return the favor. That can be your spouse, your

sibling or even a very close friend. "A man" was not the cure-all, "relationships" with adults very well could have been.

And you have absolutely no idea if the second part is true. None. More children does not mean more happiness, it can mean more poverty, ill health and stress. Ask anyone who's had a troubled child or sibling.

The weird longing for the return of social stigma, though, that is worrying. MBD may be able to tell his story as the child of a single mother, but he will never be able to experience the story of a single mother herself, and that's pretty telling. Once you start stigmatizing single mothers, that's a sin that sticks hard and lifelong. Not so with the children of single mothers, who are seen as innocent victims, temporary sinners who can be redeemed. For MBD to advocate the shunning of a societal group he is NEVER going to find himself a part of – that damages his overall case, and when combined with the way he describes his relationship with his mother, it also makes me wonder about his ability to empathize with others.

#63 Comment By [B-Rob](#) On July 19, 2012 @ 3:18 pm

@billhawk wrote "I was a virgin up to my wedding night (at age 27) as was my wife. In fact the majority of my admittedly conservative friends fall into this category."

As was my sister; her minister husband, however, was not. He, as with most adult makes of 26 to 28, had long before had sex. That you were the rare-bird does not eliminate the problem — if you wish to stop out of wedlock births, or stop abortions, you should not let your obviously rare decision not to have sex before marriage delude you into thinking (a) that that is anywhere near the norm, even for conservative, religious young people, or (b) that relying on abstinence and anti-contraception teachings will do anything other than result in more out of wedlock pregnancies and abortions.

#64 Pingback By [This Child's View Of Single-Motherhood \(personal anecdote to go with social science data\)](#) « [thereformedmind](#) On July 19, 2012 @ 3:27 pm

[...] [This Child's View Of Single-Motherhood | The American Conservative](#). Share this: [Share](#) [Email](#) [Print](#) [Digg](#) [Facebook](#) [StumbleUpon](#) [LinkedIn](#) [Twitter](#) [Reddit](#) [Like](#) this: [Like](#) [Be the first](#) [...]

#65 Comment By [B-Rob](#) On July 19, 2012 @ 3:47 pm

NGPM wrote "Regarding fecundity, let us not forget that China, for one, ENGINEERED its present "demographic problems" and chooses to continue the same policies that led to these."

True but also irrelevant. China, Russia, Italy and other countries with low birth rates all got there in different ways, but ultimately have the same problem — women are not having more than one child. How would increasing stigma in the United States do anything but decrease the rates of motherhood from their already low level? How will stigmatizing women make the men who impregnated them be more responsible? It is not the "out of wedlock" part of the equation that is even the problem; it is the "single parent" part, where the woman has no father of the baby in the house, and he is not helping raise and care for his own kid.

Again, as I noted, higher stigma, less social support, more shame . . . all tend to discourage having a child if you are pregnant. And is that REALLY what we want?

#66 Comment By [Elinor Dashwood](#) On July 19, 2012 @ 4:28 pm

Yes, Sami, quite right, because it's all about the adult, after all, especially the female adult. Young children need to learn to be mature, broadminded, and self-sacrificing, and accept the fact that their parent's needs come first. The main thing is that grownups should be free to do what they like and not be made to feel guilty just because some child feels neglected.

You make me sick.

#67 Comment By [billhawk](#) On July 19, 2012 @ 4:32 pm

@B-Rob: Ask yourself then; why has the out of wedlock birth rate and the abortion rate skyrocketed since contraceptives became commonplace? Contraceptives have allowed our culture to treat sex as if it has no

consequences, to (attempt to) separate the pleasure of sex from its natural consequences. Sex by its very nature is full of consequences, pills, rubber, wires and injections can only try to cover them up. What about the emotional ones? What about the societal ones? Modern contraception usage effective rates in the US in 2011 was only 91%, so even at attempting to prevent the reproductive consequences of sex contraception fails. Which is of course where abortion comes in. Personal sexual responsibility is the problem, and Contraception is the enabler. It enables us to be flippant about sex, and nature just won't have it that way. Ask yourself why our current generation is incapable of the kind of thoughtful restraint that was the norm for the previous history of mankind. Contraception is a big part of the problem, but the solution we're told is to just use more of it.

#68 Comment By [Mark](#) On July 19, 2012 @ 5:15 pm

MBD,

Last I checked, it takes a MAN AND a woman to make a baby. Perhaps you were having Ronald Reagan fantasies or something during that part of junior high school and could thus not be disturbed.

Also, I understand it that you come from a single-parent family. Mom AND DAD made MBD.

Then Dad made tracks.

Mom hung around, coddled your backside, and helped you grow up into the it's-all-the-woman's-fault blogging barely alive that you have devolved into today.

So, here's a thought: Why don't you go out, find your daddy, and castrate his sorry, good-for-nothing ass!

Then, pitch a bill through the Housies and the Tea Baggers that Mittens will rubberstamp to legalize wee-wee elimination for each and every man who makes a baby and then runs away from his responsibility and make sure Fat Tony, Sullen Sam, Krazy Kennedy, and You Say Something, Clarence? uphold the decisions. Start with Joey Walsh in ChiTown and work your way outward, son.

#69 Comment By [Jay](#) On July 19, 2012 @ 6:28 pm

"I do not understand why conservatives orient their policy positions on the non-sensical notion that 16 to 25 year old healthy males and females will not have sex with one another simply because they are not married. I am willing to bet that NO ONE commenting here was a virgin when they got married for the first time. So why they expect others to do what they did not do is beyond me"

You lose your bet. I was a virgin when I got married. (I'm a man, by the way.)

Surveys on this give results all over the map, from 5% virgins on their wedding day up to 50%. A realistic number appears to be in the 20-30% range.

#70 Comment By [Jay](#) On July 19, 2012 @ 6:38 pm

It baffles me when people say that we shouldn't warn someone that a decision will cause problems because that would be demeaning to those who have made that bad decision. It's amazing how these folks desperately try to convince us that a 15-year-old girl is perfectly capable of raising a child by herself. Umm, no. It is one thing to do all we can to help and support those in a difficult situation. It is quite another to pretend that their situation is not difficult. I wonder how many single mothers there are out there who honestly believe that their lives are no more difficult than those of married mothers.

What next? Will we say that you shouldn't warn kids not to drop out of school and become drug addicts, because that would be offensive to the drop-out addicts? I'm sure you could find people in this situation who are doing their best to overcome their problems, probably even some who have gotten their lives together and been successful. But that doesn't make it a smart thing to do.

I'm divorced. The absolute last thing I would want is for someone to convince my children that a broken home is just as good as an intact home. I don't want my kids to accept divorce. I want them to recognize how difficult it made their lives and resolve to do everything they can to avoid inflicting this on their own children.

#71 Comment By [NGPM](#) On July 20, 2012 @ 4:07 am

I cannot believe the hateful feminist commenters on this thread are allowed to run loose spewing their poison on a site that called itself "conservative." Forced castration? Now their true colors show through: their roots in the eugenics movement.

#72 Comment By [Columcille](#) On July 20, 2012 @ 8:26 am

Back in the 1800's, if you were an out of wedlock child (a bastard), the social stigma was intense. For example, you wouldn't be able to be admitted into a trade guild, or be eligible for an apprenticeship.

When discussing this issue at a symposium through our modern politically correct point of view, the universal response was that this was terrible and cruel.

However, there is a logic and a value to this kind of stigma. Read Carl Zimmerman's "Family & Civilization", and you realize that a society that permits the growth of non-traditional family structures is a society in decay that will eventually collapse.

Further, the lack of a father in a young man's life is correlated with the lack of virtue and character (this is the number one sociological commonality of men in prison – growing up without a father). Part of the rationale for excluding a "bastard" from the guilds was an effort to keep the moral culture of the trade/profession intact for the common good.

In addition, single mothers were, and are a threat to the stability of married couples, because the mother is psychologically and materially needy and sexually available. Single mothers have an incentive to use their sexual availability to meet their needs (and are attracted to married men, because they exhibit the kind of characteristics absent from their life). So the prevalence of single mothers in a society will contribute to sexual infidelity in marriage and marital breakdown as married men take advantage of the sexual availability of the single mother and succumb to their own weaknesses of moral character. This is why single mothers used to be shunned by married women, because they recognized the threat they posed to their own sexual bond.

Further, sexual abuse of children and teens is frequently perpetrated by an adult male who is not the father, but who is having sexual relations with the mother and has access to the children. The author alludes to the vulnerability of children growing up in single mother households.

Then, the whole cycle repeats itself. Children of single parent homes, grow up to have single parent homes.

The whole thing is a sociological cancer. Frankly the only antidote to all of this is a return to sexual morality, chastity, a "sex-is-for-babies, babies-is-for-marriage, so therefore sex-is-for-marriage" culture.

#73 Comment By [Grace](#) On July 20, 2012 @ 10:55 am

"Frankly the only antidote to all of this is a return to sexual morality, chastity, a "sex-is-for-babies, babies-is-for-marriage, so therefore sex-is-for-marriage" culture"

You're looking to return to a time that never existed, friend. What happened then was that women were policed to ensure their virginity if they happened to be in a class where they were thought of as a commodity, to be married off advantageously. (Think of Saudi, where women are not allowed out of the house unaccompanied for exactly this reason.) For most of civilized history, women who became pregnant were married off, or they and the infant were cast off entirely. In recent history they were sent to institutions where they bore their children and were immediately parted from them. This is not ancient history. I know a 55 year old woman whose parents packed her off to Central Jersey to give birth, while passing word around that she was "at her aunt's". She returned at the end of the year without a baby, and no one was the wiser other than the immediate family. The woman's been haunted by this for 40 years. Not because she gave the baby up for adoption, but because she was given no choice to decide for herself.

Notable in all of these scenarios is that the male participant gets off scot-free, with the exception of the one where angry townsfolk force him to marry the girl he knocked up. I'm sure you can imagine how well a woman and child do in a marriage where the father has been coerced into participating. Have you taken a look at domestic violence rates lately? Or at our nationally dismal record when it comes to husbands killing their wives?

Your theories about single women pursuing married men are just outdated. Single mothers are capable of earning money in valid, non-prostitution ways in the modern era, so finding a paycheck-shaped man is not as vitally necessary as it used to be. So we're left with the emotional neediness you've proposed. Leaving out the entire single-woman-as-jezebel trope, the married man is the one who made a vow, it is his duty to be morally upright. I'm not saying a single woman in a relationship with a married man is blameless by any means, but only one person entered a contract and is responsible for that contract. Own it.

"Further, sexual abuse of children and teens is frequently perpetrated by an adult male who is not the father, but who is having sexual relations with the mother and has access to the children." This is just bull. The majority of sexual abuse is perpetrated by male FAMILY MEMBERS. Biological fathers, grandfathers and uncles figure prominently in that count. It may be more comforting to think that the molester comes in from the outside world, but it's not true for most cases. Most of the time, it's someone you love and trust because of their role in your family. Rotten, but true.

If you want to be chaste until marriage, great. Go forth and don't multiply. For the rest of us, responsibility and contraception are the best ways to prevent pregnancy. I'm guessing that most of the people on this site are truly concerned about 15 year old kids in the ghetto having babies, and that's a valid concern. But those are exactly the sort of kids who aren't going to respond to shunning. They're at the bottom of the heap already, people. Almost everything is out of their reach. But by biological necessity, one thing that IS in their reach is bearing children, and that's something for which they need no permission.

There are plenty of 15 year old girls out there who get pregnant on purpose. They will tell you they're having a baby because they "want someone to love and love them back". This is idiotic, obviously, but it's also exactly the sort of tripe a 15 year old believes. If you're looking to stop that impoverished 15 year old from getting pregnant, stop trying to tell her that if she does she's a worthless slut. Plenty of people are already doing that. Give her a reason NOT to get pregnant, and then you might get somewhere.

#74 Comment By [Grace](#) On July 20, 2012 @ 10:56 am

Additionally: "Back in the 1800's, if you were an out of wedlock child (a bastard), the social stigma was intense. For example, you wouldn't be able to be admitted into a trade guild, or be eligible for an apprenticeship."

Only if you were poor. The wrong-side-of-the-blanket kids from wealthy fathers often did quite well.

#75 Comment By [rebecca](#) On July 20, 2012 @ 12:06 pm

"I cannot believe the hateful feminist commenters on this thread are allowed to run loose spewing their poison on a site that called itself "conservative." "

And I can't believe the hatefulness in advocacy to the return to such policies as "Back in the 1800's, if you were an out of wedlock child (a bastard), the social stigma was intense. For example, you wouldn't be able to be admitted into a trade guild, or be eligible for an apprenticeship. " People spewing such poison as this obviously have no personal knowledge of a single parent or children growing up in single parent homes. To them its just reading statistics in a magazine, and the assumption that all single parent families are made up of a slatternly mother and useless "bastard" children. Simply unbelievable.

#76 Comment By [rebecca](#) On July 20, 2012 @ 2:23 pm

"Only if you were poor. The wrong-side-of-the-blanket kids from wealthy fathers often did quite well."

Very true. And where would the culture of Great Britain be without the Norman influence? We have William the Conqueror, one of the greatest bastards of history, to thank for this. And what about Henry Stanley, the famous explorer of "Stanley & Livingstone" fame? Stanley (real name was John Rowlands) was always haunted by the specter of his "shame" of illegitimacy, despite his greatness, thanks to bastard-bashers like the ones we have posting on this site. Truth to tell, many kings had bastards (I will use this word since it's so popular on this site) that often went on to greatness that eluded their legitimate heirs. Many of the bastards of royalty were given duchies, earldoms and other noble titles, along with land & other resources. Some of the aristocratic houses of Europe descend from these lucky bastards. The result is far bluer blood than those of some of the self-righteous priggish posters here.

#77 Comment By [NGPM](#) On July 20, 2012 @ 3:07 pm

Nevertheless, Grace, it is MANIFEST that illegitimacy is much higher than it was when contraceptives and abortions were much higher to procure, and that the removal of the stigma surrounding this all has not lessened the post facto physical burden on the families so affected, as Michael's testimony demonstrates.

#78 Comment By [Grace](#) On July 20, 2012 @ 3:54 pm

"Nevertheless, Grace, it is MANIFEST that illegitimacy is much higher than it was when contraceptives and abortions were much higher to procure, and that the removal of the stigma surrounding this all has not lessened the post facto physical burden on the families so affected, as Michael's testimony demonstrates."

To make a true comparison here, you'd have to go back and find all children born less than 7 or 8 months after their parents married, then mark all of those children as out-of-wedlock. Also, contraceptives and abortion are not even close to the same thing. More contraceptive access results in fewer abortions. Take a look at Georgia (in Europe), which makes for an interesting-if-inconvenient case study.

Michael himself admits that reinstating the stigma would have adversely affected women like his mother. Go back and read what he says:

"So do I wish there were more social stigma, the "retrograde and ugly moral judgements" that surround decisions about sex and family? Absolutely. And yes, it would have cost her something if she indeed fell on the wrong side of those taboos. And it would cost me something to be a "bastard" if that word could still wound. People are nasty about social taboos, and I don't sanction that. But my mother faced plenty of indignities without those moral judgements. If we got do overs, I'd be willing to risk it."

He's volunteering his mother, a woman who already had an unlucky hand dealt to her, for more social shunning. I honestly don't get his logic here – is he saying that his mother shouldn't have had sex in the first place, so he wouldn't have been born? Is he saying that he wishes society would have shamed his parents into marrying? Is he saying he wishes he'd been treated as a bastard, shut out from "respectable" professions and avoided by "respectable" people? Truly, I don't understand what he means here – what would he have gained with a do-over? Is he wagering that if his parents had been FORCED to marry, it would've ended up a good marriage? That's a pretty massive gamble to take. It's also a strange prescription for society's ills. Are you comfortable saying "Any woman who gets pregnant must marry the father"? Is that a good scenario for you? I'm assuming the parents can't divorce, as that would have the same result.

Taking on your second statement, the burden on single mothers has certainly lessened in the most basic ways. Their children are able to socialize with other children. Landlords can't reject single mothers because of bias. Employers can't reject single mothers out of hand. Family tend to rally round, rather than cutting off the illegitimate child and mother – these days, it's frowned upon if you abandon your family in her hour of need, whereas a hundred years ago society DEMANDED you cast her out even if you loved her dearly, because otherwise they'd shun you too.

So yes, it's gotten better since the dark days when mothers had the choice of forced marriage or being shunned. It's not perfect, but it's better.

#79 Comment By [NGPM](#) On July 20, 2012 @ 4:20 pm

"And where would the culture of Great Britain be without the Norman influence? We have William the Conqueror, one of the greatest bastards of history, to thank for this."

Who did not whine about being the bastard or push for social change to coddle them but instead *overcame* his disadvantaged position in the most heroic of ways and proved that he was above the stigma. He didn't deserve it intrinsically; he had to earn it, and he did so. (By the way, William of Normandy apparently was marked by this unhappy aspect of his upbringing, for he was apparently faithful to his wife: THAT was and still is a rarity among heads of states.)

"People spewing such poison as this obviously have no personal knowledge of a single parent or children growing up in single parent homes... Some of the aristocratic houses of Europe descend from these lucky bastards. The result is far bluer blood than those of some of the self-righteous priggish posters here."

I'm guessing you haven't met very many descendants of European aristocratic houses and have only vague ideas of what they themselves would like to say on the subject, either.

#80 Comment By [Theresa](#) On July 20, 2012 @ 8:41 pm

Excellent! God's design is for children to be raised their entire childhoods with BOTH a father and a mother, male & female. Each brings different things into the lives of those children, by design. That is, the Creator's design, for all human beings, to bring JOY not heartache.

The American culture is in serious denial of this, and thus, in chaos, due to the trending loss of the nuclear family in our society. Downward decline will continue for the heartbreak of all involved. Very sad.

Thank you Mr. Dougherty for your honesty of the true experience of most children raised in single-parent homes. Your story is so like those I've heard from many raised without a dad, or mom, but by only one.

They truly missed the experience of the other parent.

It is people like you who will speak truth into the hearts and minds of those longing to know what truth really is and make the right choices accordingly. Choices to love a spouse first and then love their child (ren), for a lifetime.

#81 Comment By [Andrea](#) On July 21, 2012 @ 3:24 pm

I think that ship has sailed. I don't see that shaming women who are single parents will accomplish anything for the mother or the child.

Sure, marriage should be encouraged and kids should be encouraged to delay sex. I'd also like to see stronger social welfare programs so that single parents have something approximating the family leave and more flexible schedules that new parents get in Europe. Your life might have been a little easier if your mom had more money and more time to spend with you. It certainly would have been easier if she'd had a stronger network of friends and hobbies to occupy her time when you grew up. I'd be in favor of encouraging those things before I would a return of shaming the single parent of a "bastard."

I certainly knew some children of two parent households who had less than perfect parents and who turned out with some psychological problems. Not every two parent household is well off, either. A lot of life is a crapshoot.

#82 Pingback By [Ideals, Idealism, and Responsibility](#) « power of language blog: partnering with reality by JR [Fibonacci](#) On July 22, 2012 @ 12:26 am

[...] [This Child's View Of Single-Motherhood](#) (theamericanconservative.com) [...]

#83 Comment By [NGPM](#) On July 23, 2012 @ 9:49 am

"I think that ship has sailed. I don't see that shaming women who are single parents will accomplish anything for the mother or the child."

The ship has not sailed so long as there remain women who will give birth, children who will be born and fathers for them to know.

Otherwise you might as well say that shaming suicide won't do any good for the people who have killed themselves. No, but suicide needs to be stigmatized as self-murder the way it once was, as a preventative measure.

Sorry, but the sheeple need to SEE the consequences of bad behavior to see that it is indeed bad.

"I'd also like to see stronger social welfare programs so that single parents have something approximating the family leave and more flexible schedules that new parents get in Europe."

Subsidizing single parenthood? And with no moral stigmatization against out-of-wedlock pregnancy? What, then, is the tangible incentive not to fool around?

Incidentally, illegitimacy is rampant in Europe, darling, and Illegitimate youth here may grow up in more materially comfortable but their mothers are just that much more detached and the kids are hardly any stabler than their American counterparts.

Boys should be raised to become men who will respect and protect women. They need father figures to exemplify this.

Girls must be cautioned that if they do not respect and guard themselves as much as they are able, they cannot expect respect and protection from the men around them. They need fathers and brothers to learn how this interaction plays out.

#84 Comment By [singlemom](#) On July 24, 2012 @ 1:14 pm

I raised my 2 kids alone from toddler age and was lucky able to provide financially middle class/well. It was also possible in my profession to have some flexibility. So I could attend games, drive to activities, take part in my kid's lives. Still had to work 50+ hrs per wk, but some control. With no father involvement or support, I look back and think this was probably about as good as it could get. When I hear/read comments that portray single parenthood as an equal equivalent – for anyone, the children or parent I don't know whether to get angry or cry. You've got to be kidding. It happens to some of us, a lot of us. And you do the

best you can. When you bring kids into the world you are responsible for them. Self sacrifice is necessary if you're a married parent too. But single parenthood drains every atom of energy; mental and physical. You really can't do anything else. That's not the worst part. This total investment of one person is not, and will never be what your kids needed. They need 2 parents-and forgive me for saying so these days, but they need a mother and a father. If you have raised children to adulthood as one piece of that equation, you know this is true. My son had no father. My daughter had no father. The life I've had is another subject, and frankly not as important. If one parent makes their children their entire life investment, they have a chance. But you can't close that hole – no father. And you can't predict or control how that pain will show up in your child's life. There is so much absolute foolishness being sputtered about single parenthood. It should be no one's goal. Deliberately bringing a child into the world without a mother or without a father, because you believe you alone are enough is the height of arrogance.

#85 Comment By [Lucy](#) On August 1, 2012 @ 1:31 pm

I stumbled upon this article by accident when I was looking for another and have quite enjoyed it and the subsequent discussion. But I think it mixes up cause and effect. Have single-parent households increased because social stigma has lessened, or has social stigma lessened because economic changes have undermined the traditional two-parent family?

As someone used to watching American football, a sport in which concussed athletes are encouraged to shake it off and get back in the game, it's a bit disconcerting to watch the Olympics and see basketball and soccer players flop to the ground, clutch their shins, and make exaggerated operatic faces at the refs. What it reminds me of is how much economic incentives — in this case, the opportunity to score points instead of dollars — influence cultural norms. History suggests that behaviors that today would be mocked as wimpish in football would quickly become acceptable if the rules of the game were changed to make them as 'economically' valuable as they are in soccer or basketball.

In a similar way, the loss over the last thirty years of the kinds of jobs that allowed young men with high school educations to support families has dramatically disincited marriage. The culture has shifted to reflect the economic reality. To some extent it is a reinforcing cycle: being a single parent in turn makes it harder to be upwardly mobile. But the history of working class blacks, and now of working class whites, suggests that the economics comes first.

If the reverse were true, and cultural changes mattered most, we'd expect to see self-proclaimed feminists in the middle class lead the charge in single-parent households (the Murphy Browns, if you will). But we don't. The most liberal middle class households out there still, overwhelmingly, consist of two parents.

Returning to an era of social stigma — to the extent that that would even be possible — would be counterproductive so long as there are declining opportunities for working class men.

#86 Pingback By [Three Kinds of Argument on Family Structure | The American Conservative](#) On August 7, 2012 @ 7:15 pm

[...] the economic difficulties of single motherhood mean that we should work to make single motherhood less common, or that we should work to make it easier?) as well as our underlying moral [...]

#87 Comment By [FastTalker](#) On August 13, 2012 @ 10:48 am

This article was way different from what the title led me to believe would be its content. Equal blame, in many current circles, for single-parent homes. Many women want divorce, choose not to work through marital issues. It happens all the time in my small corner of the Bible-belt. There is tremendous breakdown of the family because, dare I say it, we have turned away from God. Too busy to be a family that attends church together, too busy, or lazy, to pray together, read God's word together. Women bear the largest share of this breakdown in the family, because usually they wind up as the custodial parent, but, fathers often grieve alone over the lost of family. We must change.

#88 Comment By [Singlemom2](#) On August 13, 2012 @ 11:52 am

My husband walked out when our 3 kids were babies. He got remarried, moved far away, and visits his children when he feels like it.

I have poured my entire existence into raising these children by myself. There is no such thing as "dating" or "relationships with other adults" in my life.

When will men be subject to shame and ridicule for leaving their families? WHEN.

#89 Comment By [DdR](#) On August 13, 2012 @ 12:06 pm

Morality isn't anything more than societal restrictions on behavior. How do you encourage personal responsibility in a society/culture that has for generations eroded the concept? We glorify irresponsibility in our media, and are outraged when someone suggests that our choices are ill-advised and harmful to our children – that somehow, a child letting his need for his parent's attention be known....is somehow the child's fault rather than that of the absent parent? Do single parents deserve a social life? Yes, but once you have kids – it isn't all about You anymore. If you can't handle that, then you should have put that child up for adoption at birth.

#90 Comment By [tina](#) On August 13, 2012 @ 12:37 pm

This was a beautiful article for the truths it exposed.

For those (and I notice some here) who don't seem to think the psychological problems caused by single parenthood (particularly for single women) is all that much of a problem, let me turn your attention to the social problem it is for society in just ONE area–the economy.

While, yes, there are college educated career women and other ambitious, smart women who make good money and who will never look to government for financial aid, sadly they are not the norm nor will it ever be for most single moms and their child(ren).

It used to be a source of shame for a girl and her family that she got pregnant w/out the benefit of marriage. Now, not only are women who earn paychecks choosing to have kids out of wedlock, so too are those receiving welfare choosing to have multiple children. I work with them.

Just yesterday a 25 year old whose child enters the first grade next week said, "My boyfriend and I are planning to have another kid. I went off the pill."

She receives federal aid to families, food stamps, and all the other goodies we incentivize her with and so she sees no reason not to have another child. She "works" 3 hours a week. Her boyfriend, the father of the child, doesn't work for more than a few weeks at a time. He quits any job he might find, saying, "I was overqualified for the job." Actually, he does have several natural talents, being able to fix most things around a house, but he's too lazy to make an effort to make a living with his skills as long as her check comes.

Yes, she went off the pill. We realize, of course, she is training her little girl to expect the same out of life and out of government. There is absolutely no reason for either of them to feel they are irresponsible for society never tells them they are any more as would have happened decades ago. All their friends receive the same welfare; in fact, this young woman often greets me with "Guess what else I found out I can get?" When I ask where she learned that, she tells me one of her girlfriends was told by HER welfare worker. The latest news was that she was told she could get her dog neutered for free if she showed them her card. Of course, when I explained that she already had a cat, that the money she used for cat food would now be doubled, she shrugged. "Don't worry, be happy" is her attitude.

Multiple this girl by tens of thousands, then by millions. The list of dependents will continue to grow (it is huge already, not simply the result of the last four years of financial stagnation but the result of the last several decades of the attitudes toward family formation and marriage and the lack of training youngsters to believe that they are expected to grow into makers, not takers. These people will continue to drain the coffers of each level of government, leaving nothing to help those who really cannot care for themselves (the very sick and old, the handicapped), and they will continue to serve as examples to others to suck off the sweat of others.

Now, don't go into a tizzy. Recall, I said earlier there are many single women who will be quite able to care for their children and themselves, but statistics show there is no greater correlation between low socioeconomic status and dependency than a single mother with kids.

Her boyfriend is a bozo but he hangs around for the freebies and so she never dates others who might treat her better or who might be more ambitious.

Her little girl is being taught in many ways to be dependent like mom and to never expect much of anything from a male.

I want to say more, but just thinking about otherwise intelligent people who don't see how their attitudes about family formation are not thought out sickens me.

#91 Comment By [TargetDestroyed01](#) On August 13, 2012 @ 12:50 pm

Re: Your comment: "...the sexual revolution liberated men to abandon the mothers of their children, defining fatherhood down to an alimony payment and maybe state-defined visitation."...

With all due respect, that is just plain wrong....as in NOT CORRECT! It was not the sexual revolution that allowed fathers to leave. It was government taking over the role of the father in the family. It was the rise of the Welfare State...the War on Poverty and "Great Society" and all the rest...that has for 40+ years destroyed the family. It was the attempted cure of socialism to replace the father in the family that caused and perpetuates the problem to this day. Point blank: It was and is Socialism. It always fails and leaves disaster in its path every time it is tried. We are all poorer for it. Glad to be of service. TD01

#92 Comment By [Pete](#) On August 19, 2012 @ 9:59 am

Anyone who has worked with children and families for substantial periods of time, as I have, is well aware that single motherhood, in most cases, is a disaster for all concerned. The solution is a recognition of this, thank you NYT, and a return to personal responsibility and some kind of morality. Since the media is opposed to both, only the upper middle class appears to have gotten this message, as discussed in Charles Murray's Coming Apart.

#93 Comment By [Single Mom](#) On August 19, 2012 @ 7:49 pm

As a woman who came from a single parent family, and who later became a single parent because of a husband abandoning the family, I am offended by this article! I'm more than tired of single mothers getting the blame for everything in the world, and the dad is never EVER held responsible! That man who wrote this article needs to either get counseling or get over it! You're an adult...take responsibility for your issues and STOP blaming your mother!!! Two parent families aren't always so great, especially when there are families marred by alcohol and/or drug abuse, marital infidelity, domestic violence and other problems! How does it help a kid to be in that kind of family? JK Rowling the author of Harry Potter was a battered wife who had the courage to get away from her abuser, she raised her child and wrote her book and became a success! So don't tell ME all single mothers are bad 😞

#94 Comment By [EEKittredge](#) On August 20, 2012 @ 11:39 am

Why isn't there any stigma attached to the men who create single-mother families? In juvenile court, a mother who leaves her kid alone for two hours is guilty of neglect, while a father who leaves the kid alone for 18 years is just fine, especially if he occasionally sends money.

#95 Comment By [Madisonian](#) On August 27, 2012 @ 3:24 pm

So, it seems the leftists are mostly concerned with the single adults who raise children (or not). They don't seem at all concerned with the children those adults raise (or fail to).

They made absolutely no effort to respond to the child's response to a single parent home.

Other than to reject his call for lessening the incidence of the circumstances he grew up in. Because that makes a negative statement about people. And we can't have that.

Socialism is basically selfishness on stilts, so it's not surprising that leftists are far more concerned about the feelings of adults than about maximizing the nurturing that children receive.

Feminism simply has made men free to treat women like garbage. Too bad so many women preferred it that way.

#96 Comment By [Regrets](#) On August 27, 2012 @ 3:45 pm

Thank you for posting this.

I am one of those women who do tend to look too much to my own adult child for friendship (having given up way too much on behalf of parenthood), though I hope it is not as bad as the case described in this article!

I can't change who or what I am now, but maybe we can talk honestly about stuff. Your article opens up the possibility of breaking past enforced cliches and talking about what is real.

I regret so much that I did not choose a better father for my son. No matter how many times you say "well it would have been worse if you'd done something even more stupid", the reality is that I didn't have to do anything stupid at all. Every child should be a wanted child – that doesn't mean that we should kill all the unwanted children just so we can neglect to count them; it means nobody should be making babies they don't intend and don't want.

The single parents who are doing well, have good jobs and access to lots of resources, can pretend everything is fine if they want. Too many single mothers and, yes, single fathers, have no voice; we are not allowed to speak anything that interferes with the official narrative.

That I accept that I made mistakes does not mean that I have some sort of self-esteem problem. In fact, honestly, I'm furious at the feminists who lied to me – especially the wealthy ones who reduce woman's rights to their own unresolved daddy issues, while doing nothing about the really urgent stuff, like why it's so hard to collect child support from fathers who didn't want to be fathers in the first place. I deserved better – I deserved the truth from those who were claiming to speak on my behalf, representing me, and guiding me. By claiming the right to speak for all women, feminists took on an obligation that they are refusing to honor.

My son deserved better, too. I wasn't prepared to explain why his father wasn't around. Demonizing his father would have been wrong, but it turns out *not* doing so was wrong, too – he clung to false hopes and had to have them dashed the hard way. OUCH.

My own mother raised me to be responsible and to respect obligations; feminists persuaded me that I could behave any way I like, and nobody had a right to judge me. But the feminists were lying: others do in fact have a right to judge, because judgment exists for a reason.

And can we please drop the false equivalence with stigma and judging and some fantasized return to stigma as it was practiced centuries ago? Nobody is advocating a return to stoning, and please stop using that to try to silence those who wish to talk about truths that don't fit the narrative.

#97 Comment By [Madisonian](#) On August 27, 2012 @ 3:47 pm

Single mom:

No pathologies in single parent families? Okie.

Feminism places all the responsibility for child rearing in single-mother homes on the mother. It is feminism that freed the man in the first place.

So, thank Steinem and Fonda.

By the way, if you receive public assistance, you'll never have to work, you'll only have to pretend to be job -searching. DSS will hunt down the father and mandate he work to pay child support. The single mother can stay on the sofa all she wants.

That's called law. I'll bet you support that in every election cycle.

No worries. I thank God every day I was adopted by two parents of different sex. It's just a shame that option was erased for children in 1973.

How compassionate.

#98 Comment By [Madisonian](#) On August 27, 2012 @ 3:54 pm

tina:

Many people in society don't expect much of anything from that 25 year old woman or her boyfriend.

So they had a racist Senator from Texas — LBJ — draw up the plans for government programs that would confirm their worst suspicions.

Now that no one expects much from them, it would simply be just too cruel if society raised its expectations of them.

And the upper middle class white people that promulgated the welfare state won't be able to feel all warm and fuzzy about themselves, which was the primary reason those programs were commenced in the first place.

#99 Comment By [A-Bax](#) On August 27, 2012 @ 3:59 pm

"From my perspective the sexual revolution liberated men to abandon the mothers of their children, defining fatherhood down to an alimony payment and maybe state-defined visitation."

While I feel for the author, I really do, he leaves out the flip side here. The sexual revolution liberated women to follow their gina tingles when young, and sleep with sexy exotic foreigners instead of boring-beta provider males.

He would have been better off if her mother faced the shame of unmarried pregnancy. He would have been better off if his mother had not acted on her lust for mysterious bad boys, which so many young women feel.

Old-time sexual restraint and modesty helped inculcate not only a sense of duty in young men, but also acted as a ward against hypergamy run-amok in women.

Sad tale.

#100 Comment By [VitM](#) On August 27, 2012 @ 4:49 pm

What we need is not the stigmatization of single mothers but positive reinforcement of marriage in popular culture, particularly Hollywood. Every high-profile Hollywood divorce increases the incidence of single motherhood in this country. Same goes for other popular figures (Sarah Palin? Al Gore?). We are always looking for role models... if someone like Sarah Palin could not keep her family together what message does this send to a woman from a poor neighborhood? That the marriage ideal is unattainable?

We need a TV show about a couple who starts having marital problems but decides that divorce is not the option so they slowly work through their issues... we need to make not only getting married but staying married cool again... maybe then, we will see the number of single parents diminish.

#101 Comment By [Teri Pittman](#) On August 28, 2012 @ 9:44 am

It's always more interesting to real the factual versus the theoretical. I was born in 1951 and raised by a single mom. My parents were married but were divorced before I was born. I've never had any contact with my father. My mom had to move in with her parents until I was 11, when she remarried. It didn't last long and she raised me on her own. She was killed in an accident when I was 21, shortly after I'd married. So I will never know how she would have handled that empty nest part of her life.

The only time my mom had an easy life was when she was remarried. She managed to pull herself up from factory work to office work, but she never had time for further education. She often worked two jobs to make ends meet and I got an excellent education in how to juggle finances. To my knowledge, she never received any sort of government assistance, although she did get alimony after that second marriage. I would never wish my mother's life on any woman. I was lucky to have my grandfather in my life as I feel his influence helped me develop as successful marriage of 37 years. And I was also lucky that none of my mother's boyfriends ever made sexual advances towards me. That sort of thing happens more often than we want to acknowledge.

We should be encouraging people to marry before having children. We should also be encouraging people to marry if they have children together, if for no other reason than giving fathers some legal rights to their children. My stepson had a child at 17. He sees his son at his ex-girlfriend's pleasure (she decided to marry one of his friends). As grandparents, we have no rights to see him either. We're lucky if we see him once a month. And my stepson does pay child support, which earns him no rights at all. I know that divorce is hard for children, but a family breakup is just as difficult when there is no marriage at all.

As a culture, we need to put some effort into improving the image of marriage. I can't believe some of the characters I see on tv. Young people are influenced by the culture around them. Unfortunately, influencing

behavior means disapproving of the behavior you want to discourage. I can't imagine anyone that was raised by a single mom or that is a single mom ever wanting someone else to go through the hardships involved in raising a child on your own.

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